

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Cabinet (Resources) Panel 3 March 2020
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Report title	City East Gateway A454 – Willenhall Road Phase 3 Consultation Feedback.	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Steve Evans City Environment	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	East Park, Bilston North, Wednesfield South	
Accountable Director	Ross Cook, Director of City Environment	
Originating service	Transportation	
Accountable employee	Marianne Page	Service Manager - Transport Strategy
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Report to be/has been considered by	City Environment Leadership Team	4 February 2020
	Strategic Executive Board	11 February 2020

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is recommended to:

1. Endorse Option 5 (expressed as Option B in the consultation documents) as the preferred scheme for further development following the public consultation.
2. Approve further detailed development of Option 5 and the submission of bids for development funding and potential scheme delivery funding.
3. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for City Environment in consultation with the Director of Finance to approve capital budgets to enable further development activity for the major scheme preferred Option 5.

4. Delegate authority to the Director City Environment to undertake initial discussions with potentially affected property owners to agree Heads of Terms for acquisition, should the project subsequently be approved for implementation.

Recommendation for noting:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is asked to note:

1. That further reports will be brought forward as appropriate to update on progress of funding applications.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 In October 2019 Cabinet authorised a public consultation on options to improve the transport network conditions for all users along the Willenhall Road around the Neachells Lane junction. For the corridor, referred to as City East Gateway, consultation has previously been undertaken and reported on for Phase 1 and 2 proposals. This consultation relates to a potential Phase 3 of improvement works.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide feedback on the consultation and determine what actions should follow.
- 1.3 Details of the consultation can be found at;
<https://consultation.wolverhampton.gov.uk/cwc/a454-phase3/>

2.0 Background

- 2.1 City East Gateway, the A454 Willenhall Road, is the main route through a strategic growth corridor within the Black Country that runs between Wolverhampton and Walsall, serving 34,000 homes and 75,000 jobs. It forms part of the West Midlands Key Route Network and connects Wolverhampton Ring Road at the western end with Walsall town centre to the east. The A454 also provides connection from Wolverhampton to the Black Country Route for access to the wider Black Country area, and onto the motorway network at M6 junction 10.
- 2.2 The corridor is identified within the Black Country Core Strategy and local area plans as a growth area and the need for improvements along the route have been identified within the West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan. The corridor investment proposals form part of the Black Country wide pipeline programme, aimed at delivering essential infrastructure improvements to enhance and facilitate growth and regeneration across the sub-region. Significant regeneration proposals have been outlined at key locations along the route. Identified investment is expected to provide a further 8,000 homes, and 12,000 new jobs by unlocking regeneration opportunities, therefore transport improvements are required not only to facilitate regeneration and growth, but to mitigate subsequent increases in transport demands.
- 2.3 At a local level, the corridor has been identified as a key arterial route within the City of Wolverhampton and falls within the Southern Growth Corridor. The western end of the road connects directly onto the Wolverhampton Ring Road at Bilston Road Island and provides access to the new Wolverhampton Interchange. On the northern side of the road, adjacent to the Interchange, lies Canalside Quarter regeneration site.
- 2.4 The Canalside proposals together with the Interchange development plans, aim to provide high quality residential and mixed use and office developments, providing around 1000 new homes and approx. 100,000 square feet of commercial space, respectively, for the city. The proposed corridor highway improvement is considered crucial in improving the market viability of these sites.

- 2.5 There are also significant regeneration land allocations around the Qualcast Road and Hickman Avenue areas that will benefit from improved traffic flow and access. A strategy to maximise the value of this land for commercial and industrial activity is being developed.
- 2.6 Options for improving the western section of the A454 between the Ring Road and Hickman Avenue have been reported on previously, they form City East Gateway Phase 1 and 2. This report focuses on Phase 3 Neachells Lane junction, which in addition to the improvements to the A454 traffic conditions, provides the key access to the Neachells Lane industrial estate area.

3.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.

- 3.1 The previous report in October detailed how the improvement option assessment work had been carried out and that two options had been identified for public consultation.
- 3.2 Option A (Also referred to as Option 1). Involves widening Willenhall Road west bound to provide an increased right turn capacity into Neachells Lane and longer queuing lane on Neachells Lane southbound to better segregate right and left turning traffic. This addresses the identified key issues of traffic turning right into Neachells Lane and the capacity of traffic travelling south through the junction.
- 3.3 Option 5. Involves the construction of a gyratory system which removes many of the traffic conflicts from the existing junction thereby significantly improving the efficiency of getting traffic through the junction.
- 3.4 Options 1 and 5. Both have been subject to a further review for operational efficiency and projected financial benefits and initially show positive results. The current cost estimate (upon which the positive indication of value for money is based) for Option 1 is £6 million and for Option 5 is £16 million.
- 3.5 Illustrations of Options 1 and 5 are attached at Appendix 2 and 3 respectively.
- 3.6 The assessment has demonstrated that Option 1 benefits deteriorate substantially within a few years and that Option 5 maintains benefits over a much longer time period.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 Appendix 3 shows the responses received to the consultation questionnaire.
- Where responses have been received from is shown geographically.
 - Answers to standard questions are shown graphically
 - Freeform responses are shown in full

From this it can be seen that there is a good cluster of responses from people living close or working close to the corridor.

- 4.2 Out of a total 161 responses;
- All respondents were familiar with the corridor and of those 30% lived on the route.
 - 93% are of the opinion that improvements are needed along the corridor
 - 67% supported Option 5 with 33% believing that Option 1 was the best option.

- 4.3 Appendix 3 also contains all the free format responses that were submitted.
- 4.4 Concerns raised included:
- A. A worry that Option A is not a viable long-term solution and would need to be upgraded sooner than Option B, wasting public money.
 - B. The Hamburger Island proposed in Option B will result in lane confusion for drivers, leading to casualties.
 - C. Neither Option A nor Option B go far enough to fully solve the traffic problems that exist on Willenhall Road.
 - D. Concerns regarding the disruption to traffic (and how long it will last) that will be encountered whilst carrying out either options.
 - E. Both options are a massive waste of public money to essentially save people 10 minutes of their journey time.
 - F. Neither of the options address the issue of residents parking on Willenhall Road due to a lack of off-road parking. Parked cars present as a huge problem to the many HGV's and buses that navigate it.
 - G. Public money should be used on improving the public transport routes (the rail line from Walsall to Wolverhampton via Willenhall) in order to ease traffic on Willenhall Road and would be a more sustainable choice.
- 4.5 Responding to the above issues:
- A. Assessments have proven Option B to have a longer-term positive impact on traffic, however it comes at a much higher cost to Option A, therefore both options were put forward for the public consultation.
 - B. It is entirely plausible that there will be an initial period of learning if Option B is implemented (as there would be with any new road layout). However, the roundabout will be clearly signposted in accordance with good practice and subject to Safety Audits before and after construction.
 - C. Fourteen options were initially considered to solve the traffic problems that exist on Willenhall Road. Through the EAST assessment tool (Early Assessment Sifting Tool) Option A and Option B emerged as the most viable to address the traffic issues based on the broad range of criteria used in the assessment.
 - D. Disruption to traffic is inevitable with any road improvement. A conscious effort will be made to ensure disruption is kept to a minimum and opportunities to carry out the work offline are maximised. Temporary traffic management will not be allowed to impact on traffic flows during peak hours and the works programme will reflect the need to keep existing traffic moving reasonably.
 - E. Whilst we appreciate that there is the option of doing nothing, City of Wolverhampton has identified City East Gateway as a major transport link into the city and are committed to improving the route for all who use it. This is necessary to support the economic well being of the city by ensuring this key transport link is available to support the transport needs and regeneration proposals. It is being considered alongside other transport options in the Willenhall corridor including new rail stations to increase rail patronage.
 - F. Option B will go some way to addressing this, as a slip road would be created giving some residential properties parking outside the main highway.

- G. The City of Wolverhampton is already committed to an integrated public transport scheme involving new rail stations and the current and proposed Metro extensions. It must however be recognised that many trips on this route cannot be made by public transport and a balance needs to be developed where commuting trips have a good public transport offer but the needs of tradesmen and commercial businesses that need to use road transport are catered for.

5.0 Reasons for decision(s)

- 5.1 The Council has already agreed that there is a clear need to improve the transport infrastructure in the Willenhall Road corridor to meet current travel demand when considering Phases 1 and 2.
- 5.2 The objective assessment process has been extended to look at the options for Phase 3 and an extensive number of options reviewed to determine the potential optimum way forward. The approach being recommended is consistent with the approach already considered for Phase 1 and 2 and caters for current issues identified and supports the regeneration objectives for the corridor.
- 5.3 To compliment the approach already being considered for Phases 1 and 2 and address the major identified delay and air quality issues experienced at Neachells Lane it is necessary to identify a scheme for this section of the corridor.
- 5.4 This report seeks approval to develop Option 5 which whilst being the more expensive and more invasive option of the two under consideration, it does provide a much longer-term solution to this critical corridor. If Option 1 is taken forward the junction will potentially require further improvement within five years of completion if existing problems are not to recur.
- 5.5 Both options necessitate land acquisition but in the case of option 5 the land take is more significant and involves the acquisition of two domestic properties in addition to vacant land. The extent of the land required for both options can be seen on the scheme plans.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 The current estimate for the preferred option project is £16 million.
- 6.2 Indicative bids have been made for future years of Major Roads Network funding. Midlands Connect who are administering the process for the region on behalf of Department for Transport (DfT) have yet to assess the scheme but have ranked it for second phase funding between 2025 and 2030.
- 6.3 The Major Roads Network funding does require a local contribution of 15% and options to fund this are being explored. If it is decided to proceed with the scheme, a detailed funding package will be presented in a future report, to include appropriate approval of any financial commitment from the Council.

- 6.4 To maintain progress of the proposal it will be necessary to secure additional scheme development funding, to date the scheme has been jointly funded by the Black Country LEP and the Council but this funding allocation runs out at the end of March 2020. Options for securing the required additional development funding are being explored, Approval of future capital budget requirements will be sought through an IEDN in accordance with the delegation above.
[HM/05022020/N]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 If a scheme is approved for further development it should be noted that the proposed projects involve the acquisition of third party land and property. If a project is subsequently approved for implementation it will require a further resolution to acquire third-party interests in land affected.
- 7.2 Any highway improvement project that was subsequently approved for implementation will also require Traffic Regulation Orders. Any orders for the control of traffic and parking will be subject to statutory legal procedures and further public consultation.
- 7.3 Formal approval of a project in the future could cause blight and a legal entitlement from land and property owners for the acquisition of affected properties by the Council and compensation.
- 7.4 When a road layout is changed and assessed if noise thresholds are broken there is also the potential for claims under Part 1 of the Land Compensation Act 1973. This Act provides that compensation can be claimed for residential property that has been reduced in value due to physical factors such as noise and pollution caused by public works, even though no land is acquired. The potential for noise thresholds to be broken will be investigated if further scheme development is approved. It is currently assessed that there are a small number of domestic properties that could be affected with increased noise pollution which may require double glazing to be installed.
- 7.5 An initial review of the current scheme against Planning Regulations has been undertaken and concluded that planning permission will be required.
[RR/30012020/T]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 Detailed assessment is yet to be undertaken but if a project is taken forward to construction it will be designed to ensure accessibility to all members of the community and an Equalities Impact Assessment and Road Safety Audit undertaken to formally review the design.

9.0 Climate Change and Environmental implications

- 9.1 If a project is developed further these issues will be assessed in detail before a decision is taken on whether to implement a scheme. There are currently air quality threshold issues for some residential property in the vicinity of the junction. Reductions in queuing and stop start traffic will help to reduce air pollution and noise levels.

10.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 10.1 If a project is developed further these issues will be assessed in more detail before a decision is taken on whether to implement a scheme. There are currently air quality threshold issues for some residential property in the vicinity of the junction. Reductions in queuing and stop start traffic will help to reduce air pollution and noise levels and thereby improve resident's health.
- 10.2 The scheme would also include better facilities for active travel modes and any increase in walking and cycling has the potential to improve the health of residents.

11.0 Human resources implications

- 11.1 No human resource implications have been identified associated with the matters in this report.

12.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 12.1 No corporate landlord implications have been identified associated with the matters in this report.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

- 13.1 Report to Cabinet (Resources) Panel dated 1 October 2019; [City Est Gateway A454 Phase 3 Improvement Options](#).

14.0 Appendices

- 14.1 Appendix 1 – Illustrations of Option 1.
- 14.2 Appendix 2 – Illustrations of Option 5
- 14.3 Appendix 3 – Consultation results